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SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: ENCOURAGING SIGNS OF SUNNA-SHIA
RECONCILIATION

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Salah ad Din cable.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Deputy Governor of Salah ad Din says he had a very good meeting with the Prime Minister July 16, resulting in a promise of more money for the province and the prospect of an office of provincial affairs within the Prime Ministry. The Deputy Governor has previously indicated to the PRT that PM Maliki's willingness to take on Shiite armed groups opened the door to rapprochement with Sunni Arabs who were previously very suspicious of him. We see encouraging signs of grassroots efforts at Sunna-Shia reconciliation, aided by improved security in Samarra: Salah ad Din tribal leaders visited Karbala, Shia pilgrims from Najaf visited Samarra, and Salah ad Din expects visits by leaders from Najaf, Karbala and Amara in the near future. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) Salah ad Din Deputy Governor Abdullah Hussein al-Jubara al-Juboori (Abu Khaled) told PRT Team Leader July 17 that he had had a very good meeting with PM Maliki the previous day. He said the Prime Minister had promised to allocate more money to the province - perhaps doubling its original 2008 allocation of 176 billion Iraqi Dinars. Abu Khaled made clear his pleasure at the state of relations with the Prime Minister. From what he has told the PRT previously, the turning point was the PM's willingness to take on armed Shia groups earlier this year: that opened the door to rapprochement with Sunni Arabs (like Abu Khaled) who were previously very suspicious of him.

¶4. (SBU) Since then, and thanks in part to the much improved security situation in Samarra (a Sunni town in Salah ad Din that has a major Shia shrine twice devastated by terrorist bombings in 2006-07), we have seen encouraging signs of efforts at reconciliation between Sunna and Shia: tribal leaders from Salah ad Din were invited to (heavily Shia) Karbala; Sunni Vice President Hashemi visited Samarra, then ISCI leader Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim did likewise; thousands of Shia pilgrims from Najaf followed suit; and Salah ad Din is expecting visits in the near future by leaders from Najaf and Karbala as well as from Amara.

¶5. (SBU) Abu Khaled happily informed PRT Team Leader that an office of provincial affairs will be created in the Prime Minister's Office. As he understood it, there would be roughly one coordinator for every two provinces. This, he felt, would facilitate communications to the point where "we won't need to go to Baghdad any more." (COMMENT: A well-connected local who was listening in observed good-naturedly: "We won't need the PRT any more." To which the Team Leader replied: "That's the whole idea." END COMMENT.)

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: There is an unmistakable air of optimism in the provincial leadership of Salah ad Din these days, which is all the more striking considering that this, Saddam Hussein's home province, has been one of the biggest losers in the change of regime. Six months ago, the Deputy Governor was refusing to go to Baghdad for fear of being arrested or killed. The PRT facilitated some trips to the capital for

meetings with national leaders in the intervening months;
this time, the Deputy Governor traveled without any American
involvement. The PRT will continue to report on the progress
of reconciliation between sects and between the province and
the national government.
CROCKER